

1 **CAMDEN DOWNTOWN PLAN WORKING GROUP**

2 **Minutes of Meeting**

3 **November 22, 2011**

4
5 **PRESENT:**

6
7 There were twenty-one people attending including the five-member Lachman Architects
8 and Planners Team, and representatives from all of the organizations comprising the Town of
9 Camden's Team except one; Dan Bookham, the Executive Director of the Penobscot Bay
10 Regional Chamber of Commerce, was unable to attend. The attached Working Group Contact
11 List includes the names of those attending, their affiliations and email addresses.

12
13 **1. Welcome and Introductions**

14
15 Brian Hodges, Camden's Development Director, welcomed those attending saying that
16 the fact that so many have come is proof that there is a great deal of interest in the project. He
17 opened the meeting with a brief history of the formation of a Working Group: Shortly after his
18 appointment as Development Director, Mr. Hodges went to the Select Board to request funding
19 to create a Downtown Master Plan. They gave him their full support, and agreed with him that
20 creating a sustainable business plan was necessary to encourage development, and to ensure a
21 vital downtown business district far into the future.

22
23 Mr. Hodges worked with members of Camden's Community & Economic Development
24 Advisory Committee (CEDAC) and the Camden Downtown Business Group (CDBG) to create a
25 Request for Quotation (RFQ). From the eight submittals received, the group selected Lachman
26 Architects and Planners to lead the effort. Members of the Lachman Team have begun work on
27 the Plan.

28
29 Members of the Lachman Team participating in the project are: Dennis Lachman,
30 Architect; Regina Leonard, Landscape Architect; Megan Cullen, Architectural Preservation
31 Consultant; Rodney Lynch, Planner; and Michael Sabatini, Engineer. Dennis Lachman and his
32 Team want to take away from this meeting a good sense of what the Camden Team specifically
33 wants to see at the end of this process.

34
35 **2. Study Area**

36
37 Mr. Hodges projected a map of the downtown and harbor areas of Town with the Town's
38 Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) highlighted. It is common for Downtown Master Plans to
39 follow the same district lines as a TIF because the two programs complement each other; that
40 was the original concept for Camden's Plan. However, Mr. Hodges has heard from citizens who
41 are questioning those boundaries, and Mr. Lachman has suggested that the Working Group have
42 a conversation about the Study Area, and set the final study boundaries today, before the final
43 data collection gets underway.

44
45 There are properties in the downtown area Town that are bounded by the TIF, but not
46 included in the Downtown Plan – the Knox Mill and the Library properties (the Library, Harbor
47 Park and the Amphitheatre). Then there are Wayfarer's properties, all of which are included in
48 the TIF and in the Plan. The question before the Group is whether or not any, or all, of these

1 properties should be part of the Downtown Master Plan. Mr. Hodges and Mr. Lachman
2 explained that the discussion concerning the Study Area might be based on two questions: Is
3 Wayfarer really part of the “heart and soul” of downtown? Is it a better use of Lachman’s
4 resources to include the Mill and surrounding areas instead? The budget for the project was
5 small to begin with, and the RFQ did not include the Mill or the Library properties. If Wayfarer
6 remains part of the Plan, and the Mill and Library are added, an adjustment to the Work Plan will
7 have to be made either by increasing the funding for the project, or by adjusting the scope of the
8 work.

9
10 The Camden Team offered comments strongly in support of keeping Wayfarer as part of
11 the Plan, as well as including both the Mill and Library properties:
12

13 *Wayfarer:*

- 14 • The harbor is a big draw, and should be considered an egress point, just like a highway
15 would be, to move people into the downtown. Wayfarer is a big draw on its own, and the
16 people that come to the boat yard are shuttled back and forth across the harbor all day
17 long.
- 18 • Mr. Fullilove reminded the group of the strong public sentiment against bringing
19 commercial development to Wayfarer’s Bean Yard, and the strong support for the
20 Working Waterfront designation. He suggested that if the Working Group wants the
21 public’s support for the project, they must avoid the appearance of ignoring that history.
22 Mr. Verest wondered if they should remove the Bean Yard from the Master Plan, since
23 that was the site Townspeople wanted to keep in marine use. Mr. Sargent noted that a
24 portion of that Yard is approved for residential use, but that does not mean that Wayfarer
25 gave up the right to commercial uses elsewhere in the Yard. Before anything is done Mr.
26 Verest wants to make sure that someone is talking to Wayfarer about what is happening.
27 He suggested that Susan Howland, Wayfarer CFO, be asked to offer an opinion or,
28 perhaps, to participate in the Working Group.
- 29 • There was full support by the Town Team to have the Lachman Group look specifically
30 at the Town’s Steamboat Landing area to see what the best use of that property might be.
31 Can the area be used to help relieve congestion at the Public Landing and to help promote
32 access to the harbor?

33 *Library:*

- 34 • Dave Jackson urged the Group to support including not just the Library in the Plan, but
35 the Park and the Amphitheatre as well. Main Street merchants supported including the
36 Library and grounds because they are a destination in and of themselves, and patrons
37 walk down the street to eat and shop while they are in Town.
- 38 • Ms. Pribyl noted that the Library is not only an anchor for the Downtown, but is an actual
39 part of the campus; when conferences come to Town, the Library is often used for
40 meeting space or to host related events.

41 *Mill:*

- 42 • Mr. Cohn noted that the reason the Mill property had not been included in the TIF
43 District originally was because, at that point in time, the property was falling in value due
44 to management issues. Now that there are new owners and the property is more stable, it
45 is important to show the Town’s support for the owners’ efforts and include them in the
46 Plan.

- 1 • Mr. Gross noted that the Mill is an important source of space for businesses locations,
2 and the businesses that have started in the Mill need the Town’s support if they are to
3 succeed.

4 Mr. Lachman and Mr. Hodges both stressed the fact that the Mill and the Library would
5 indirectly benefit from the Master Plan because efforts would be made to attract development to
6 adjacent properties. However, the Town Team wanted to see the properties specifically included
7 in the Master Plan. Mr. Gross suggested that there could perhaps be different levels of
8 recommendations made for the properties in question. With regard to making recommendation
9 to attract more development to the Library properties, that just won’t happen. The Lachman
10 Team should ignore that phase of the Work Plan for that property. The same would apply, in
11 part, to the Mill; the more stable areas along Mechanic Street probably don’t need the same
12 intensity of effort as other areas.
13

14 The Town Team was in agreement with Mr. Lachman’s summary of the discussion: He
15 suggested that the scope of the effort can be adjusted: The breadth of the study area is to be
16 increased, but the depth of the study is to be adjusted, with the amount of work to be done
17 allocated specifically for different areas. He suggested that the Town Team go through the list of
18 services that the Work Plan includes, and come up with a recommendation where services might
19 be cut without affecting the end product, and without increasing the cost to the Town.
20

21 **3. Goals & Objectives**

22 **a. What does the Town Team hope to accomplish?**

23 Mr. Lachman is looking for consensus from the Group in determining the most important
24 areas to study. The top three issues identified by the Town Team are all inter-related:
25 Traffic, Signs and Parking.
26

27 *Traffic:*

28 Mr. Lachman’s first impression as he drove into Camden was “disorganized chaos”; it is
29 very hard for someone new to Town to know how to get from one point to another around the
30 Downtown area. His Team sees the overarching need is helping to organize traffic flow with
31 good signage as well as, perhaps, some design changes.
32

33 *Parking:*

34 Camden has a perceived “parking problem”, a reputation that is not deserved; it keeps
35 people who believe this away from the Downtown. Sufficient parking is not the problem, most
36 of the year there are lots of empty spaces – finding those places is the problem. Traffic
37 congestion will be relieved by making parking spaces easier to find, and signage is vital to
38 solving that problem. After years and years of failed discussions, the Town Team hopes that the
39 Lachman Team can put this problem to rest once and for all.
40

41 *Signage:*

42 It is already recognized that the Town’s current directional signage is ineffective and
43 insufficient. Camden has an “anti-sign” reputation which has been deserved in the past, but Ms.
44 Quijano informed the Lachman Team of the Sign Working Group - a subcommittee of the
45 Planning Board recently re-activated to work with members of the DTBG on improving signage
46 in Town. Among the Sign Group’s first projects is to fix the current directional signs design
47 flaws, determine who pays for any work, recommend a new color scheme, find some new
48

1 locations, and get Select Board approval in time for the changes to be made for the summer
2 season; at the same time they will be working on directional signs to individual businesses.

3
4 Mr. Lachman questioned members of the Sign Group about this project and how it might
5 overlap with some of the signage work they will be doing; his Group will be working initially on
6 the first tier of signs – larger directional signs that can be read from a moving vehicle and used to
7 direct drivers around Town. Then they would make some recommendations for the smaller
8 second tier signs directing those on foot to different locations. The most important thing is to
9 have all the signs tie together in purpose and design.

10
11 The need for business signage directing visitors to specific areas of Town was stressed by
12 business owners, and Mr. Wilson noted that there have already been discussions on some
13 changes that could be made fairly quickly and, perhaps, without needing amendments to the
14 Ordinance.

15
16 The Sign Group is anxious to hear from the Lachman Group about signage that has
17 worked elsewhere, as well as what has not. But, they want to have some of the sign changes
18 ready as soon as possible. Mr. Gross noted that the Town can call a Special Town Meeting to
19 vote on changes to the Sign Ordinance that are not ready for June, and the changes can be put in
20 place as soon as possible.

21
22 *Best Use of Town properties:* The Work Plan calls for looking at Town-owned properties to
23 determine what the best use or re-use of that property would be:

- 24 • The Town Office is in the same building as the Opera House; is that Main Street space
25 better suited for commercial use that would complement the uses at the Opera House?
- 26 • Is the Chamber of Commerce Building in the right place at the top of the Public Landing?
27 Could the Chamber provide information to visitors more effectively if it was located in a
28 more visible, easier-to-access location? The building is out of sight of drivers on Route
29 One; this is one of the hardest spots to get in to and out of in the Downtown; parking is
30 limited; and giving directions to drivers originating from that spot is very difficult
31 without putting them right in the middle of the worst intersection around.
- 32 • The Public Landing is perhaps the most misused piece of property on the harbor: one of
33 the best views in Town is given over entirely to parking. This doesn't make good sense,
34 and the Group is anxious to see what ideas the Lachman Group might have for this
35 property.
- 36 • Are there recommendations that make better use of some of the parking spaces as part of
37 a re-design that would encourage pedestrian traffic?

38
39 *How to further beautify parts of Town:*

- 40 • Entrances to places like the top of Bayview Street should be dressed up to make the street
41 more inviting to new comers and draw visitors on down the Street.

42
43 *How to make the Town more attractive to new businesses:*

- 44 • This is an old problem, but one for which the Town Team is anxious to hear a new
45 approach.

46
47 *How to encourage a vital and vibrant year-round Downtown:*

- 1 • This is the mission of the CDBG: ways to encourage businesses to stay open year round
2 is even more important given the economy and the change in Camden’s year-round
3 population.
4

5 **b: What defines a successful effort?**
6

- 7 • Townspeople return to the downtown during the weekdays to do routine business.
8 Businesses miss the office workers from MBNA days: they were good for business
9 during the otherwise slow times – they need them back.
10
11 • If we can finally bring a college to Town: This is a perfect college town; the only thing
12 missing is the college, and it would be of great benefit to the downtown merchants.
13
14 • Many studies have been done before: This group wants to see some new ideas from
15 planners who know their business.
16
17 • Once the Plan is ready the Town will be able to take advantage of all economic
18 development opportunities instead of reacting with yet another study.
19
20 • The ability to host more and larger conferences because we know what is available and
21 can make use all of the Town’s facilities.
22

23 **4. Work Plan**
24

25 The Work Plan calls for a series of Working Group meetings plus two Public Meetings.
26 Mr. Lachman suggests the Working Group consider treating this project as a collaboration with
27 the public. He recommended that at the first Public Meeting in January the Group use the
28 opportunity to tell the public what the data shows to date, share the principle ideas and then open
29 up the floor to a discussion. One month later the Group goes back to the public saying: “We
30 heard you, and this is what we have changed. What do you think of this?”
31

32 The Town Team was asked to think of different constituencies in Town that they
33 represent in addition to the DTBG and CEDAC: the Garden Club is very active in the
34 Downtown and they should be involved; there are businesses that are not members of the DTBG
35 that should be brought into the conversation early on. This will be a Master Plan to serve the
36 entire Town’s needs.
37

38 Mr. Lachman explained what the Group will see at the next meeting when the data is
39 presented: There are three “legs” to the Master Plan, each handled by different members of his
40 Team: The Economic component is the responsibility of Rodney Lynch; the streetscape
41 component which includes signage and design is being handled by Regina Leonard and Michael
42 Sabatini; and the buildings and property assessment will be done by himself and Megan Cullen.
43

44 Questions from the Town Team:
45

46 What are the major impediments to economic development in Camden?

47 Mr. Lachman: Overcoming the “chaos”: disorganization of streets, lack of clear walking paths;
48 and inadequate signage.

1
2 Ms. Leonard: The landscape and the streetscape are beautiful, but there is no language and no
3 cues to tell people “You want to be here. You want to stop here.” The perception people have
4 when there is parking on both sides of the street is that pedestrians are not welcomed here. They
5 need to be made more important with better crosswalks and clarifying signage.
6

7 Mr. Lynch: Camden has transitioned from a mill town up until the ‘60’s and 70’s; to a town with
8 many new in-migrants with money in the 70’s who displaced many of the natives and brought a
9 different feel to the Town; to a bank town in the 90’s; and now, is in the post-MBNA transition
10 era, with a concentration of small businesses and a service industry. The mid-coast area is
11 booming in comparison to most other areas of the State, but Camden hasn’t found its place yet
12 and needs a niche to set it apart. Unlike Rockland or Belfast, Camden doesn’t have the space to
13 do some of the large events that have brought so much business to these towns. But, there is a
14 campus atmosphere here – a high tech society, that could be taken advantage of. Other areas
15 where Camden might concentrate efforts are in attracting “locally made” businesses – that is a
16 growing business sector at this time.
17

18 **6. Early Streetscape Information:** Regina Leonard working with Mike Sabatini

19 Ms. Leonard has just arrived in Town and, with Mr. Sabatini as her guide, has started
20 looking around. She was immediately taken by the canal (river) and the possibilities of
21 exploiting that asset in combination with some of the smaller side streets and turning the area
22 into a cohesive package.
23

24 They will also be offering suggestions on parking and getting people from point “A” to
25 point “B”.
26

27 **5. Early Economic Information:** Rodney Lynch
28

29 To gather this information, Mr. Lynch met with members of CEDAC, with Dan
30 Bookham of the Chamber, and he made field visits. These are some of his observations and
31 recommendations (a copy of his full report is attached to these minutes):
32

- 33 • There are several things the Town can do preliminarily to promote economic
34 development. Among them are: streetscape beautification projects that attract people to
35 travel around corners and down side streets – like installing the same Main Street-style
36 lampposts elsewhere; move parking off Main Street to Mechanic Street (perhaps to a new
37 two-level parking garage); and maximize upper story infill to bring other businesses and
38 residents to downtown.
39
- 40 • Long Term Goals to Attract New Businesses to the Downtown include: create TIF
41 subsidized business incubator or TIF-Private Sector Investment Partnerships; promote
42 marine-related tech businesses; work to attract Maine-made locally produced goods and
43 services; and promote small business growth to minimize long-term impact of large
44 business closures.
45
- 46 • Address some of the obstacles to creating strong year-round businesses like high rents.
47 Main Street may be full, but can they last? Convince local people to do more business
48 downtown by encouraging shops that sell things people need in their everyday lives.

1 Camden used to have two or three shoe stores and clothing stores and local people
2 shopped downtown.

- 3
- 4 • Get people off Main Street and to the Mill: Create a River Walk leading to a new
5 destination - refurbished Mill Ponds - along a repaired river boardwalk; perhaps financed
6 by a new TIF for the Mill properties.
- 7
- 8 • The Opera House is an economic tool, but it needs to be upgraded in order to maximize
9 its use.

10

11 Mr. Lynch will be meeting with members of the DTBG Executive Board on December 1
12 to get their input into the Plan.

13

14 **7. Closing Thoughts**

15

16 Mr. Lachman reiterated how much his Team will rely on this Group to ensure that the
17 Downtown Master Plan *is* Camden's Plan.

18

19 Mr. Hodges noted that over the past few months there have been many successes in Town
20 of different organizations working together; that kind of cooperation is a good background to this
21 effort.

22

23 Ms. Pribyl urged the Lachman Team not to think of the Town developing within
24 "banker's hours" but to think about developing business during the evening hours as well. Right
25 now the only businesses open in the evening are restaurants – all the shops are dark, yet there are
26 people on the streets.

27

28 Mr. Gross is excited to see what kind of ideas come from someone new to offering
29 proposals. There have been many economic development studies done in the past few years, but
30 they were done by locals and generated the same old ideas. Now there are new eyes on the
31 problems, and they can ignore the history that has dogged past efforts. Mr. Sargent noted past
32 studies included Blue Ribbon panels and a CAFCA project among others. The Town can't
33 afford to miss this opportunity, but they must remember that they need to do something once the
34 study is done.

35

36 Mr. Lachman asked the Town Team to revisit the scope of the Work Plan to see what
37 recommendations they can make to adjust efforts to include the Knox Mill and the Library as
38 well as Wayfarer.

39

40 There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.

41

42 Respectfully submitted,

43

44

45 Jeanne Hollingsworth
46 Recording

Secretary

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